JOURNAL OF CONTROVERSIAL IDEAS

Article

Enlightened Tribalism

Filipe Nobre Faria [1,*], Jonathan Anomaly [2] and Craig Willy [3]

[1] Nova Institute of Philosophy (IFILNOVA), School of Social Sciences and Humanities – NOVA FCSH, Colégio Almada Negreiros, Campus of Campolide, Nova University of Lisbon, 1099-032 Lisbon, Portugal
[2] Centro de Estudios en Filosofia, Politica, y Economia, Universidad de Las Américas, UDLA Park, Antigua Vía a Nayón, Quito 170124, Equador; jonathan.anomaly@protonmail.com
[3] Centre for Biomedical Ethics and Law, KU Leuven, Oude Markt 13, 3000 Leuven, Belgium; craig.willy@student.kuleuven.be
* Corresponding author: filipefaria@gmail.com

Submitted: 3 September 2023, accepted: 4 July 2024, published: 30 October 2024

Abstract: Tribalism is often derided as a morally primitive form of human organization. But for most of human history, people organized themselves into tribes that facilitated collective action and provided their members with a sense of security and identity. In stark contrast, liberal cosmopolitans have promoted the ideal of the world community. They tend to diminish the moral importance of tribal attachments and instead claim that altruism should have a more universal scope. We argue that although tribalism can encourage needless conflict, it can also provide meaning, promote important virtues, and increase the long-run viability of human groups better than liberal cosmopolitanism. We call the view that we endorse "enlightened tribalism." We end by identifying some of the problems tribalism can create, and distinguishing the kind of tribalism that leads groups of people to flourish from the kinds that lead to unnecessary suffering or self-destruction.

Keywords: tribalism; liberal cosmopolitanism; evolutionary anthropology; biocultural theory; global ethics; conflict and cooperation; evolutionary ethics; political philosophy

How to cite: Faria, F.N.; Anomaly, J.; Willy, C. Enlightened Tribalism. *Journal of Controversial Ideas* **2024**, *4*(2), 9; doi:10.35995/jci04020009.

Introduction

In Western societies, tribalism is often regarded as undesirable. Liberal theorists want to minimize tribal impulses, highlighting dangers like war, loss of individual autonomy, and the seemingly irrational religious and ethnic traditions that cement tribal affiliations. We argue, to the contrary, that efforts to eradicate tribalism are futile, and that tribalism itself is crucial for the flourishing of human life. We argue for an "enlightened tribalism."

In doing so, we follow the biopolitical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, who defend political cultures that can be described as tribal.[1] Such cultures require people to hold allegiance to an in-group and to defend it from other collectives. On this view, the good life is tied to the pursuit of the common good of a particular people and does not involve strong obligations towards out-group members. Moreover, loyalty is highly prized. According to Plato, "when the Greeks fight with other Greeks, we'll say that they are natural friends and that in such circumstances Greece is sick and divided into factions."[2] According to Aristotle, a key mark of a tyrant is that "he likes foreigners better than citizens."[3] On the classical view, tribalism and parochial altruism were seen as virtues rather than vices.

However, liberal modernity weakened this tribal tradition. Since Thomas Hobbes, political philosophy began to focus on preventing conflict and maximizing individual autonomy, usually by deemphasizing communitarian duties. Hobbes himself criticized the Aristotelian tradition, arguing that human happiness is not about living according to reason or virtue, but rather about satisfying one's desires and avoiding pain. In the West, people became WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) as liberalism became the dominant social and political philosophy. As a result, Westerners often see individuals as more important than groups.[4] The combination of economic globalization and individualism makes many people view tribalism as regressive, dangerous, and immoral.

Developments in evolutionary anthropology, though, challenge the feasibility of cosmopolitan projects. The "received view" of moral evolution is that humans evolved through tribal competition and that morality emerged as a tool primarily to improve reproductive success and promote in-group cooperation, not universal cooperation.[5] This view does not deny our ability to cooperate peacefully with other groups,[6] but it suggests there are natural limits to how far this cooperation can extend. For instance, favoring kin over non-kin is normally adaptive over the long-run.[7,8] As Richard Dawkins notes, "much as we might wish to believe otherwise, universal love and the welfare of the species as a whole are concepts that simply do not make evolutionary sense."[9]

Evoconservatives and evoliberals are scholars who use evolution to support their political views,[10] and they often agree that evolution pushes toward parochial altruism. Yet this common ground does not resolve their political differences, which remain strong.

Evoconservatives argue that humans are "hardwired" for tribalism and thus efforts to expand altruism to all people are futile.[11,12] They have various sources of evidence to

---

1 Ojakangas, M. (2016). *On the Greek origins of biopolitics*. Routledge.
2 Plato (360 BCE). *The Republic*, 5.8, Translated by B. Jowett. link to the article.
3 Aristotle (350 BCE). *Politics*, 5.11. Translated by B. Jowett. link to the article.
4 Schulz, J., Bahrami-Rad, D., Beauchamp, J., & Henrich, J. (2019). The church, intensive kinship, and global psychological variation. *Science*, 366(6466). link to the article.
5 Buchanan, A., & Powell, R. (2018). *The evolution of moral progress: A biocultural theory*. Oxford University Press, ch. 4.
6 Glowacki, L. (2022). The evolution of peace. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 47: 1–100.
7 Axelrod, R., & Hammond, R. A. (2006). The evolution of ethnocentrism. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50(6): 926–936. link to the article.
8 Jones, D. (2018). Kin selection and ethnic group selection. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 39(1): 9–18. link to the article.
9 Dawkins, R. (1989). *The selfish gene*. Oxford University Press, p. 2.
10 A taxonomy popularized by Buchanan & Powell (2018).
11 Asma, S. (2012). *Against fairness*. University of Chicago Press, pp. 45–46.
12 Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind.* Allen Lane, p. 245.

back up their view. For example, they can point out that infants aged 6–9 months prefer faces that match their own race,[13] and that children prefer to hear the voices of people who speak their local language.[14] They can also show that even liberals, who are often seen as open-minded and tolerant, show as much partisan bias as conservatives.[15]

Evoliberals, too, tend to think that humans are inherently tribal, but they propose several ways to advance cosmopolitan ideals. Some evoliberals claim that biomedical enhancement might remove or weaken tribal feelings and help us overcome tribalism.[16] Other evoliberals prefer to nudge people toward universal cooperation by strengthening institutions such as global markets, thus bypassing the need for universal altruism.[17] Still others, like Buchanan and Powell, argue that tribalism is only one dimension of our moral psychology.[18] In their view, the moral mind is highly flexible and morality is open-ended, enabling a continuous expansion of the circle of altruism. They contend that universal concerns can persist when institutions meet basic needs, and that moral progress is marked by increasing respect for human rights worldwide.

In contrast, we defend tribalism as a virtue. In the first section, we counter criticisms leveled against it. In the second section, we delineate our preferred form of this practice, which we call "enlightened tribalism." This is different from unreflective kinds of tribalism that can be self-destructive and unduly belligerent. In the third section, we address objections to enlightened tribalism. We argue that it is a superior form of political organization to liberal cosmopolitanism, both in ethical desirability and evolutionary robustness.

Defending Tribalism

a. On tribalism and liberal cosmopolitanism

Allen Buchanan defines tribalism as "a way of thinking and acting that divides the world into Us versus Them."[19] He also states that tribalism "achieves cooperation within a group at the expense of erecting insuperable obstacles to cooperation among groups."[20] Under tribal morality, he claims, people "acknowledge demanding moral obligations toward members of their own group but don't extend anything approaching the same moral regard to members of other groups, human or nonhuman."[21] Although we endorse Buchanan's parsimonious definition of tribalism, we think his qualifications poison the well against tribalism: there is no reason to think favoring one's in-group excludes the possibility of

---

13 Xiao, N. G. et al., (2017). Infants rely more on gaze cues from own-race than other-race adults for learning under uncertainty. *Child Development*, 88(5): 1626–1641. link to the article.

14 Mampe, B., Friederici, A. D., Christophe, A., & Wermke, K. (2009). Newborns' cry melody is shaped by their native language. *Current Biology*, 19(23): 1994–1997. link to the article.

15 Clark, C. J., Liu, B. S., Winegard, B. M., & Ditto, P. H. (2019). Tribalism is human nature. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28(6): 481–486. link to the article.

16 Persson, I., & Savulescu, J. (2012a). *Unfit for the future*. Oxford University Press.

17 Sauer, H. (2019). Butchering benevolence: Moral progress beyond the expanding circle. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 22(1): 153–167. link to the article.

18 Buchanan & Powell, 2018.

19 Buchanan, A. (2020a). Précis: Our moral fate: Evolution and the escape from tribalism. *Analyse & Kritik*, 42(2): 443. link to the article.

20 Buchanan, 2020a, p. 443.

21 Buchanan, A. (2020b). *Our moral fate: Evolution and the escape from tribalism*. MIT Press, p. 1.

cooperating with out-groups to achieve mutual gains. Strategic coalitions are, after all, ubiquitous in social animals, and certainly common in humans.

There are good reasons to favor one's own tribe – however one may define it – in the same way that people treat their family and friends better than they treat strangers. After all, attention and altruism are scarce resources. Tribalism, however, does not require that groups never cooperate with one another, nor that they treat outsiders with hostility. Tribalism merely requires in-group favoritism. We can think our group has a special status, and deserves our attention, without thinking other groups are worthy of aggression.

Buchanan worries that tribalism often leads to violent conflict and dehumanizing attitudes. And, of course, he is right that these are risks. But we can extol the virtue of tribalism without succumbing to the facile view that it always leads us to treat other groups badly. Political doctrines, like public policies, have trade-offs. One should judge tribalism and cosmopolitanism not only for their intuitive plausibility but also for their predictable consequences over long tracts of time.

Many evoliberal thinkers argue that humans should overcome tribalism, even if we evolved via tribal competition. They often concede that it is beneficial to feel a sense of belonging and concern for certain groups – such as family, friends, or communities. In fact, Buchanan and Powell argue that these elements are vital to morality.[22] But tribalism involves more than just these aspects of belonging and caring. Tribalism also divides people into ”Us” and ”Them,” viewing other groups as competitors or enemies.

For most evoliberals, it is possible for one to experience belonging and exhibit care without engaging in tribal behavior. They often propose liberal cosmopolitanism, a view that asks us to treat all people as part of one moral community that transcends local borders. This view may respect cultural and individual differences, but mostly upholds universal values and duties.[23] We focus on liberal cosmopolitanism because of its cultural prominence among modern intellectuals, and because it contrasts sharply with the tribalistic view that we endorse.

Evoliberals suggest various methods to escape tribalism and achieve more universal moral agreement and cooperation. Three proposed methods are noteworthy: “socio-economic enhancement,” “moral bioenhancement,” and “institutional bypass.” But, as we shall argue, these three methods fail to show that it is possible to overcome tribalism in the long run.

b. Socio-economic enhancement

Buchanan and Powell advocate for inclusivist moralities, which expand the range of moral concern to all humans and possibly other living beings.[24] They counter evoconservatives by asserting that despite our tribalistic tendencies under harsh conditions, humans still possess the capacity for moral plasticity (or open-ended normativity). Moral plasticity, they claim, has allowed us to extend our circle of concern to all humans and even many animals.

Buchanan and Powell argue that cosmopolitan goals are achievable and sustainable when humans have enough socio-economic resources. In this state, people are “unshackled from the demands of reproductive fitness,”[25] and can be inclusive without

[22] Buchanan & Powell, 2018, pp. 63–65.
[23] Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. W. W. Norton.
[24] Buchanan & Powell, 2018.
[25] Buchanan, 2020a, p. 446.

fear for their survival. The authors call this state "Surplus Reproductive Success," where morality becomes independent from reproduction. To overcome tribalism, they recommend norms and policies that foster both surplus reproductive success and cosmopolitan values.

However, we question whether morality can ever be independent from the pressures of reproductive success, given its role as a social tool that enhances reproductive fitness. But even if we could briefly escape these pressures and adopt a fitness-independent morality, nature would eventually impose challenges that threaten these conditions of abundance. In the extreme, natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanoes, and infectious diseases can reintroduce the amount of scarcity that undermines inclusivist morality.[26] Human-made disasters such as warfare, international discord, and environmental damage can have a similar result. Sometimes, disasters can bring different groups together for a short time, like the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. But these kinds of events are rare, temporary, and require a common enemy or threat.

Overall, inclusivist moralities are less viable when scarcity increases due to catastrophic events. But even in conditions of plenty, tribalism can still prevail over inclusivism if some groups reproduce faster than others. This can be observed in contemporary fertility trends, where poorer and more tribal countries have much higher fertility rates than wealthier ones, as shown in Figure 1.[27]

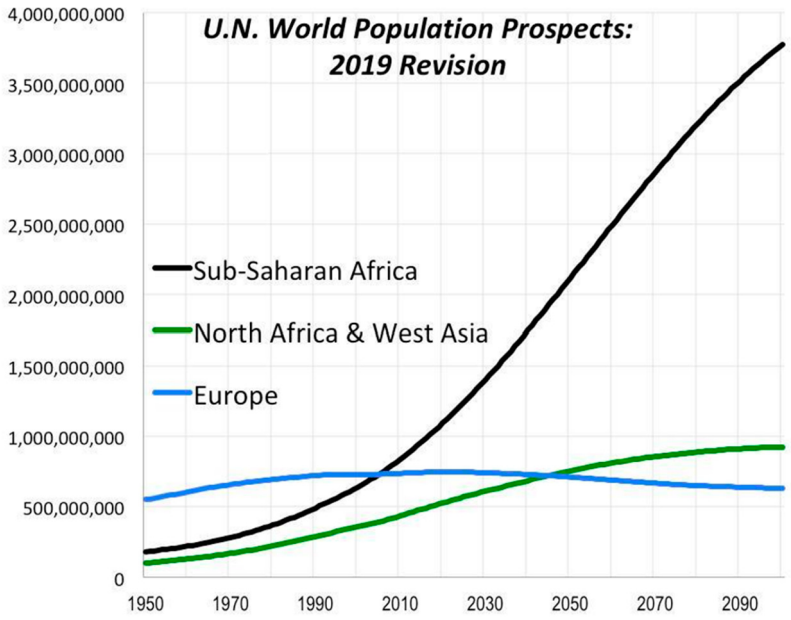

Figure 1

Tribalism, while important, is not the only driver of reproductive success, of course; health, pro-natalist cultures, and migration to new territories also matter. However, tribalism stands out because it tends to prioritize in-group reproduction, a trait often seen in nationalist policies. And even if global fertility drops, faster-growing groups can still dominate and gain an evolutionary advantage over others.

---

[26] Sauer, 2019, p. 153.
[27] link to the article.

Buchanan and Powell's claim that tribalism can fade in times of plenty is doubtful, especially over long periods. They argue that when humans reproduce in abundance due to plentiful resources, genetic rivalry matters less, and humans can become cosmopolitan, even if it lowers group fitness. But this is impractical over time, because a group must have more children than its rivals for its cosmopolitan behaviors to last.[28] What determines the persistence of such behaviors is not just the total number of offspring, but the relative success of a group in spreading its genes. Therefore, if cosmopolitanism lowers fitness in relation to tribalism, cosmopolitan behaviors will be outcompeted by tribal ones.

To illustrate, imagine two gene clusters in a population – A and B. Cluster A encourages cooperation with other groups only when advantageous to its own group members, while cluster B promotes generosity even when others do not reciprocate. Over time, cluster A, which is more "tribal," will likely outbreed cosmopolitan cluster B, as having offspring and limiting outsiders' reproduction is advantageous. If a group avoids competition with others – by being cosmopolitan – it loses in the long run, unless it can stop the rise of more tribal groups. But this would mean stopping both the genetic and cultural changes that lead to tribalism – which seems impossible over a long enough period.

Ultimately, a combination of genes and culture determines how adaptive a group is, and some cultures are better at promoting reproductive success than others. There is nothing inevitable about the richest or most inventive or altruistic culture predominating. Indeed, morality and culture can be adaptive or maladaptive.[29] That is, some beliefs and practices lead groups to expand and prosper, while others lead groups to extinction.

Moral norms that are adaptive in some circumstances can become maladaptive in others. Western individualism is a notable example of this. By promoting openness to trade, individualism seems to account for a substantial amount of prosperity the West experienced over the last few centuries.[30] This prosperity assisted the population expansion that allowed Europeans to spread across several continents during the colonial era. But this does not mean that individualism will prevail, especially because Western populations with individualistic norms, despite being prosperous, no longer have high reproductive rates. On the contrary, they have had relatively low birth rates for the past century, falling well below replacement over the last few decades.[31]

The instability of individualism is not surprising. Game-theoretic simulations strongly suggest that tribal strategies trump individualistic, cosmopolitan, or universalist strategies in the long term.[32] This is because tribal groups can benefit from the productivity of other groups that follow universalist strategies, without reciprocating. Thus, they can keep the benefits within their own group. By doing so, tribal groups out-reproduce and displace cosmopolitan groups.

Cosmopolitanism could still triumph, even with lower birth rates, if its culture and ideas were attractive enough to spread to all groups. This is doubtful, however, because there is cultural resistance to liberal ideas in many parts of the world, including in Western Europe for the first time since the Second World War. Many people will reject cosmopolitanism when it interferes with their unique attachments to family, community,

---

[28] Wilson, D. S. (2002). *Darwin's cathedral*. University of Chicago Press, p. 38.

[29] Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. J. (2005). *Not by genes alone*. University of Chicago Press, ch. 5.

[30] Henrich, J. (2020). *The WEIRDest people in the world*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

[31] Faria, F. N. (2017). Is market liberalism adaptive? Rethinking F.A. Hayek on moral evolution. *Journal of Bioeconomics*, 19: 307–326. link to the article.

[32] Hartshorn, M., Kaznatcheev, A., & Shultz, T. (2013). The evolutionary dominance of ethnocentric cooperation. *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, 16(3): 7. link to the article.

and tradition. These people's commitment to their tribal values would help their group maintain its integrity and, in hard times, its dominance over others. Ultimately, cultures that are more resilient and produce more offspring will have an evolutionary edge over others.

Buchanan and Powell are right that the moral mind is quite plastic, and that culture evolves faster than genes.[33] This gives human groups the capacity to create new normative orders and adapt to new contexts and challenges. Individualism and cosmopolitanism, which are prevalent in the modern West, are some of these orders. Many humans are not hardwired for tribalism and can develop both cosmopolitan and tribal beliefs without major genetic changes.[34]

However, some individuals are more tribal than others.[35] And cosmopolitan ideals have not prevented the rise of more autocratic and nationalist countries in regions like Africa and South Asia, where population growth is much higher than in Western countries. In fact, the genetic and cultural descendants of Western Europe have the most cosmopolitan and democratic societies, but also some of the lowest birth rates.

Instead of focusing on what kinds of institutions make people wealthy at a certain point in history, we should ask whether those institutions can last for a long time because they help people survive and reproduce.[36] In other words, we need to ask if humans can ever break free from the predictable effects of natural selection that evolutionary models show. We doubt it.

Let us focus on two main models in evolutionary biology: inclusive fitness[37] and multilevel or group selection.[38] Most social evolution researchers accept these two models, which are equivalent "on the grounds that gene frequency change can be correctly computed using either approach."[39]

Inclusive fitness explains altruism toward relatives. It shows that by promoting the welfare of a relative, even a distant one, we can contribute to the propagation of genetic variants similar to our own. Sometimes, kin are not helped if the cost is high or the benefit is low. Still, inclusive fitness explains why people tend to prefer those with more shared genes, such as family, over those with less, such as outsiders.

Multilevel selection describes how natural selection targets different levels of biological organization, such as genes, individuals, and groups. Group selection is particularly relevant for explaining altruism, which is when living things help others at a fitness cost to themselves.[40] For example, a soldier may risk his life to save his comrades in a battle. Altruism can evolve because it helps groups survive and compete with other groups. The intensity of competition between groups matters: less competition leads to more selfishness and less cooperation within social units, while more competition leads to less selfishness and more cooperation within social units. This means that, as a

---

33 Perreault, C. (2012). The pace of cultural evolution. *PloS ONE*, 7(9). link to the article.

34 Jost, J. (2006). The end of the end of ideology. *American Psychologist*, 61(7): 651–670. link to the article.

35 Haidt, 2012; Jost, 2006.

36 Anomaly, J., & Faria, F. (2023). Can liberalism last? *Social Philosophy and Policy*. link to the article.

37 Hamilton, W. D. (1964). The genetical evolution of social behavior I. *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7(1): 1–16.

38 Sober, E., & Wilson, D. S. (1998). *Unto others: The evolution and psychology of unselfish behavior*. Harvard University Press.

39 Birch, J., & Okasha, S. (2014). Kin selection and its critics. *BioScience*, 65(1): 28. link to the article.

40 Wilson, D. S., & Wilson, E. O. (2007). Rethinking the theoretical foundation of sociobiology. *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 82(4): 327–348. link to the article.

rule of thumb, selfishness beats altruism within groups, but altruistic groups beat selfish groups.[41] In short, altruism requires competition between groups. And there is ample evidence that humans are a highly group-selected species.[42]

Group selection fosters altruism toward people in the same group, even if they are not genetically related. For example, some Catholics or Mexicans may prefer others who share their religion or nationality over people of the same race who do not. This seems to contradict inclusive fitness theory, which says that humans tend to prioritize their genetic relatives. In reality, however, cooperation is often stronger inside particular genetic clusters within countries. For example, indigenous people in the Americas often prefer to live and cooperate more with each other than with mestizos or pure Spaniards. Similarly, in South Africa, whites, native tribes, and mixed-race people (called "coloreds") tend to form their own ethnic enclaves. Like group selection, inclusive fitness theory is also well supported by evidence.[43] This suggests that group selection is not random, but relies on genetic distance, which is how different two groups are genetically: "The most likely and hence common type of group selection has probably operated between extended kin groups, or, more accurately, between groups separated by a significant genetic distance."[44]

Social groups are fluid and dynamic, even when they are based on kinship ties. A key reason is that larger groups often have an advantage over smaller ones, as they can access more resources and wield more influence. To enjoy these benefits, groups sometimes need to extend their altruism to potential new members. Henrich and Muthukrishna explain how this works: "nuclear families that manage to expand into clans beat independent nuclear families. Clans that bind themselves into tribes … tend to beat lone clans."[45] Likewise, bigger "tribes" such as nations or civilizations often beat smaller tribes. However, groups cannot afford to be altruistic toward everyone. This process "does not lead to the fulfillment of a romantic vision of universal niceness. Conflict and competition are not eliminated but merely elevated in the biological hierarchy."[46]

In short, models of social evolution suggest that over long periods of time, tribalism drives out universalism. In the long run, evolution favors parochialism over universalism, and economic prosperity cannot change this.

c. Moral bioenhancement

Evoliberals propose other strategies to achieve cosmopolitan aims in the face of tribal pressures. Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu, for instance, accept that human concerns are mostly restricted to kin and tribe, as people's moral psychology evolved in competitive close-knit groups.[47] These evoliberal authors have little hope that education or institutional incentives can make people extend their moral concern beyond their tribes. They argue that what is needed for humans to achieve a more cosmopolitan mindset is

---

41 Wilson & Wilson (2007).

42 Hertler, S. C., Figueredo, A. J., & Peñaherrera-Aguirre, M. (2021). *Human group selection: A multilevel selection perspective*. Springer Nature.

43 Abbot, P. et al. (2011). Inclusive fitness theory and eusociality. *Nature*, 471(7339). link to the article.

44 Salter, F. (2003). *On genetic interests*. Peter Lang, p. 47.

45 Henrich, J., & Muthukrishna, M. (2021). The origins and psychology of human cooperation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 72: 17. link to the article.

46 Sober & Wilson, 1998, p. 174.

47 Persson & Savulescu, 2012a.

to curtail tribal dispositions with biomedical technologies. This way, humans may extend their moral concern indefinitely.

Persson and Savulescu explore how neuroscience, pharmacology, and genetics can influence moral behavior and judgments.[48] They cite oxytocin as a drug that can change moral decisions, such as increasing cooperation and altruism – but also ethnocentrism. Another example is propranolol, a drug that some have said may reduce racial bias.[49] Importantly, behavioral genetics reveals that moral traits have a genetic basis,[50] which means they could be biologically altered in the future.[51] If moral bioenhancement may someday weaken tribal preferences, it is worth exploring whether this is a desirable aim.

Intergroup competition has a particular virtue: it supplies incentives for technological innovation and excellence. Two of the greatest bursts of cultural and intellectual creativity happened in classical Greece and early modern Europe. It is remarkable that they were not peaceful universalist empires, but competing, often warring states. Indeed, tribal conflicts tend to accelerate technological development, and the resulting new technologies are often used for non-military purposes, like increasing welfare and survival capacities.[52]

Not all forms of intergroup competition lead to innovation, of course; some can be purely destructive. And innovation also relies on other factors, including social trust, organizational structures, and effective wealth management. Still, parochial cooperation remains key for technological innovation and excellence, and it emerges from intergroup competition. Without such competition, free-riders thrive within groups, as they gain more from exploiting public goods than from contributing to them. This reduces cooperation everywhere, as the number of cooperators decreases. Groups can increase their internal cooperation by identifying and punishing free riders. And facing competition from other groups makes them stricter against free riding to prevent military defeat. Indeed, cooperation increases when people sacrifice for their group against a common foe. High levels of cooperation in turn facilitate the production and transmission of cultural innovations. And when the ability to cooperate evolves, it can also be extended to cooperation with outsiders. Ironically, even intergroup cooperation requires some degree of intergroup competition.

Bioenhancing people to make them care for everyone – rather than allowing them to remain partial toward particular people – could decrease the number of destructive conflicts among human groups. But it could also undermine the kinds of motivations that lead to material social progress, military might, and individual virtue.[53] Technology and between-group cooperation are essential to develop different cultural solutions for new ecological threats. We do not know what kind of out-groups or threats may appear down the evolutionary road. A species with pacific traits may not evolve the ability to cope with serious, unknown challenges.

---

48 Persson & Savulescu, 2012a.

49 Terbeck, S., Kahane, G., McTavish, S., Savulescu, J., Cowen, P., & Hewstone, M. (2012). Propranolol reduces implicit negative racial bias. *Psychopharmacology*, 223(3): 419–424.

50 Baron-Cohen, S. (2003). *The essential difference: Male and female brains and the truth about autism*. Basic Books, p. 114.

51 Persson, I., & Savulescu, J. (2012b). Moral enhancement, freedom, and the God machine. *The Monist*, 95(3): 399–421, p. 7. link to the article.

52 Ruttan, V. W. (2006). *Is war necessary for economic growth? Military procurement and technology development*. Oxford University Press.

53 Puurtinen, M., & Mappes, T. (2009). Between-group competition and human cooperation. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 276(1654): 355–360. link to the article.

Savulescu and Persson advocate for a type of moral enhancement that could lead to what Nietzsche called "the last man" – a person who avoids competition, finds comfort in the crowd, and acts altruistically to the point of losing the ability to thrive. This "enhancement" would not be an advantage, but a drawback for social groups, who would become easy targets for hostile outsiders. To prevent this, the enhancement would have to ensure that altruism is based on real reciprocity and that there are effective ways to spot and punish cheaters.[54] In other words, it would need to mimic the beneficial traits of tribalism.

Moral bioenhancement faces two major obstacles. The first is the challenge of finding the right balance of altruism and competition, so that altruism does not become pathological.[55] The second obstacle is the difficulty of deciding when to apply moral bioenhancement, so that it is only done when all other groups also do it. If some groups get bioenhanced for universal altruism before others, they will lose out. And given the world's diversity and conflicting interests, it is unrealistic to expect everyone to agree on when to start bioenhancing. These obstacles are difficult to overcome.

d. Institutional bypass

Some evoliberals favor improving social institutions over moral bioenhancement to achieve a non-tribal world. Buchanan and Powell suggest promoting inclusiveness and economic development to reduce tribalism. But we have shown that this has limited effects. An evoliberal, Hanno Sauer, agrees. He concedes that human inclusiveness has "evolutionary limits,"[56] but he still hopes for global and tribeless cooperation. Thus, he recommends institutions that can bypass our moral biases, such as the market.

Sauer uses Adam Smith's concept of the invisible hand to argue that the market can overcome tribalism. He points out that Smith also believed that people are only altruistic to their close ones, such as family and friends. Beyond that, cooperation fails and people cheat. But the market, according to Smith, "allows individuals to cooperate without tapping into these (altruistic) motives …, people cooperate independent of or even against their will."[57]

Sauer's proposal is different from Buchanan and Powell's, or Persson and Savulescu's. He contends that "smart" institutions, such as the market, can foster cooperation without making people more altruistic. This cooperation stems from self-interest; that is, from the pursuit of profit. Then, as people adapt to market norms, they become more trusting and open to strangers. Sauer concludes that the market's existence and success in bypassing our limited altruism show that we can create more institutions like it to extend the scope of cooperation.[58]

The market is a well-known example of how diverse populations can cooperate. But markets do not emerge by themselves. They depend on political action, such as policies that define property rights, enforce contracts, etc. As Karl Polanyi points out, even free markets are planned, as they need a political framework to regulate market exchange.[59]

---

[54] Anomaly, J. (2024). *Creating future people: The science and ethics of genetic enhancement*. Routledge, ch.2.

[55] Oakley, B., Knafo, A., Madhavan, G., & Wilson, D.S. (eds.). (2011). *Pathological altruism*. Oxford University Press.

[56] Sauer, 2019, p. 163.

[57] Sauer, 2019, pp. 163–164.

[58] Sauer, 2019, p. 164.

[59] Polanyi, K. (2001). *The great transformation*. Beacon Press Books.

There are many kinds of markets, such as markets for food and clothing, as well as markets for human kidneys, recreational drugs, and sex. States must make political choices about which markets they will allow or promote, regulate, or tax. Moreover, markets only work well when there is high social trust, which depends on social norms and political institutions that are difficult to build and easy to destroy. If markets rely on deliberate political action and fragile social norms, then they rely on the decisions and practices of social groups, including governments.

Some governments avoid global market cooperation for valid reasons. Free markets can generate wealth, but many countries protect their own industries to avoid dependence on others for essential goods like food or medicine. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 revealed the risk of such dependence. Moreover, markets produce wealth inequalities that may spark social resentment. People are not only concerned about how much wealth they have, but also how much they have compared to others.[60] Countries with large and persistent wealth disparities may face revolution.[61] These things are intuitively grasped by ordinary people, which partly explains why they support protectionism and nationalism in populist movements.

Still, it is conceivable that markets could foster global cooperation by creating a strong interdependence among people, making protectionism harmful for everyone. This idea aligns with the (fitness) *interdependence hypothesis*, which states that human cooperation evolved because it was essential for our survival and reproduction.[62] In other words, we had to help each other in order to survive and continue our lineage.[63] Markets can enhance this kind of interdependence by encouraging people to specialize in different production activities, making them rely on each other for various goods, especially vital ones like food and water. In this situation, people have strong incentives to cooperate through global exchange and global institutions.

However, markets cannot guarantee global cooperation. First, markets rely on political institutions that can either collapse from internal causes or be managed by individuals lacking the knowledge or intention to foster global cooperation. Moreover, leaders with substantial economic and military power can often compel other nations to address global issues, even without reciprocating. And finally, markets might lose their interdependence effect if technology like artificial intelligence and machines can make synthetic resources, which would reduce the need for trade or colonies.

In the end, the evoliberal proposals for how to overcome tribalism offer solutions that are fragile and transitory. Rather than fighting tribalism, we are better off distinguishing destructive from healthy versions of it. Tribalism, we will now argue, can be part of a virtuous life.

Virtues of Enlightened Tribalism

a. Tribalism as a source of existential meaning

Many people display tribal behavior and feel a deep connection to their own groups, such as friends, family, or nations. They think there are reasons to favor some groups of people

---

60 Frank, R. (2011). *The Darwin economy*. Princeton University Press.

61 Turchin, P. (2006). *War and peace and war: The rise and fall of empires*. Plume Books.

62 Tomasello, M. (2012). Two key steps in the evolution of human cooperation: The interdependence hypothesis. *Current Anthropology*, 53(6): 673–692. link to the article.

63 Aktipis, A., Cronk, L., & de Aguiar, R. (2018). Understanding cooperation through fitness interdependence. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2: 429. link to the article.

over others. In matters as trivial as sports, or as important as religion or politics, people often support the team or church or party they grew up with. Cosmopolitan liberals tend to see these attachments as real but regrettable atavisms from our evolutionary past (especially when it comes to nations). We disagree. While unreflective tribalism can be socially destructive, what we call "enlightened tribalism" can be virtuous. Enlightened tribalism can make life meaningful, promote cohesion within groups, and create more sustainable social relations between groups.

"Virtue" is a vague term. We follow Aristotle in using it to refer to character traits that promote human flourishing, such as honesty or courage. However, we also use it to refer to the benefits of living in particular ways. For instance, we can praise a brave person as "virtuous." But we can also say that objects or political systems have "virtues" when they perform well or bring benefits. Here, we defend the view that enlightened tribalism has two main virtues: it promotes a meaningful life, and it has better consequences than alternatives like cosmopolitan liberalism.

Some evoliberals suggest that we should create a global society by being more altruistic.[64] But this has a big cost: losing meaningful group ties. We cannot love everyone equally. We tend to favor people who have traits similar to our own.[65] And we may jeopardize our reproductive success if we value other people's children as much as our own. Crucially, we find joy and purpose in belonging to groups that share our religion, culture, or community (especially family). These unique relationships motivate us to live. We might also care about global issues, but not as much as our groups. When other groups threaten our values and conflict arises, we feel a strong urge to protect and act on those values. Otherwise, we may lose our valued identity. As the saying goes, "There are no atheists in foxholes," and no nihilists either.

Tribal life can promote virtues such as loyalty, courage, and self-sacrifice, which benefit the common good and mental health.[66] However, people vary in how much they value these virtues. Conservatives tend to value them more than liberals.[67] Liberals often prefer universal causes like human rights or global justice. But most people – including liberals – are unlikely to make costly sacrifices for anonymous people rather than for people who are part of groups that they value. Liberals are right to critique blind tribalism, but not tribalism itself, which is a natural and meaningful part of human life. We should appreciate our natural tendency to form tribes, not see it as a flaw to be "fixed."

b. Enlightened tribalism's virtuous mean

Enlightened tribalism is a form of tribalism that is based on a scientifically sound understanding of how humans evolved to be group oriented. It aims to use this knowledge to help one's group thrive and prosper. It values the importance of myths, symbols, and emotions in promoting group cohesion. But it justifies its approach to thinkers and leaders on the basis of evidence, avoiding reliance on arbitrary concepts of collective identity. It

---

64 Persson, I., & Savulescu, J. (2017). Moral hard-wiring and moral enhancement. *Bioethics*, 31(4): 286–295. link to the article.

65 Froehlich, L., Dorrough, A. R., Glöckner, A., & Stürmer, S. (2021). Similarity predicts cross-national social preferences. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 12(8): 1239–1250. link to the article.

66 Florian, V., Mikulincer, M., & Taubman, O. (1995). Does hardiness contribute to mental health during a stressful real-life situation? The roles of appraisal and coping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68(4): 687–695. link to the article.

67 Haidt, 2012.

also acknowledges duties toward other groups, which stem from the need to cooperate with outsiders for mutual gain. Thus, it recognizes that our communities' well-being often depends on trading and peace with foreigners.

Enlightened tribalism can be considered the virtuous mean between blind tribalism (which can foster human annihilation) and undiscerning universalism (which can veer into ethnomasochism). This virtuous mean actualizes the benefits of in-group sentiment while avoiding the risks and harms of excessive tribalism. Tribalism enables the emergence of a social unit that facilitates collective action. It pursues group goals that provide metaphysical meaning for group members, thus helping them to fulfill their collective potential and survive in competition with other groups. Given that tribalism is often part of human behavior, wise statesmen will organize their societies so that in-group sentiment fosters unity and civic virtue instead of tearing society apart.

At the species level, tribalism is crucial to preserving cultural and genetic diversity between populations. It also provides resilience to unpredictable shocks and selection events in the future, such as plagues, or the kind of rapid climate change that has occurred throughout Earth's history. A single genetic and cultural identity for all humans, like any single identity, would be prone to extinction. Having a variety of cultures and genes, by contrast, means having many ways of living and adapting to changing environments. This is key to a species' survival and growth over time.[68]

Enlightened tribalism promotes biocultural diversity by encouraging the preservation and expression of local cultures and their distinctive modes of communication and cognition. For instance, it supports the production and consumption of local cultural and media products, and it is compatible with educating students in both their native language and a global language such as English. It also balances cultural diversity with social unity, because too much diversity can weaken social bonds.[69] Globally, this approach values the separateness of political and social systems rooted in different civilizational traditions (Western, Islamic, Confucian, Hindu, etc). Therefore, it welcomes the development of indigenous tech and social media companies that can shape their own information environments. This welcome would cease, of course, if such environments threatened one's tribe.

Such an approach fosters the self-esteem and identity of group members, which can be of great social benefit. In a society without a common identity in which ethnocentrism is suppressed in the name of tolerance, there will tend to be more factions, such as clans, classes, or political blocs. And the relations between these factions may, paradoxically, be even tenser than they would be in a society guided by enlightened tribalism. Liberal societies, for example, tend to be fragmented, held together by consumerism and legal guarantees, rather than by the warmth of feeling that tribalism creates. This often leads to polarization and internal conflicts.[70]

Group identity can help people work together for the common good and care for each other, which are essential features for achieving a high level of civilization. A major advantage of tribalism is that it can nurture altruism. Enlightened tribalism seeks to find the best ways to create such a group identity.

---

[68] Fogarty, L., & Kandler, A. (2020). The fundamentals of cultural adaptation: Implications for human adaptation. *Scientific Reports*, 10(1): 14318. link to the article.

[69] Putnam, R.D. (2007). E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30(2):137–174.

[70] Boxell, L., Gentzkow, M., & Shapiro, J. M. (2021). Cross-country trends in affective polarization. *The Economic Journal*, 131(637): 2058–2088. link to the article.

Challenges to Enlightened Tribalism

a. Avoiding blind tribalism

We will address four objections to our view: it can be abused, it ignores universal moral equality, it causes war, and its rational basis conflicts with a tribal mindset.

Although we are defending an "enlightened" form of tribalism, it may be argued that rejecting moral cosmopolitanism is dangerous to the extent that, if enough influential people embrace this view, it might encourage the proliferation of unenlightened forms of tribalism. This could lead to violence and killing between and within nations. Of course, this is always a possibility. Theories can be misused. For instance, Karl Marx did not predict the horrors of communism in poor countries. He thought communism would happen in wealthy ones. Likewise, a corrupt leader could use enlightened tribalism to justify atrocities. This does not mean our view is wrong. It means that humans can use any idea for good or bad.

Excessive tribalism and lack of cooperation can harm many nations. For example, some postcolonial nations damaged their economy by targeting vital minorities, such as Indians in Uganda or white farmers in Zimbabwe. This may be maladaptive for groups, as economic conditions affect demographic success. Similarly, the Third Reich's tribalism backfired. It lost many scientists to the USA by excluding Jews. It also demeaned Slavs and failed to cooperate with eastern European nations, thus losing their support. By seeking the survival of the German race with a rigid understanding of its identity, it brought about its downfall and left Germany smaller, occupied, divided, and destitute.

This blind tribalism is not inevitable: we can cultivate healthy, "enlightened" tribalism without succumbing to aggressive myopia. Improving our own people does not mean attacking other peoples. Indeed, as Jonathan Haidt notes, group selection may involve out-group aggression, but it primarily promotes in-group cooperation:

> Whatever traits make a group more efficient at procuring food and turning it into children make that group more fit than its neighbors. Group selection pulls for cooperation, for the ability to suppress antisocial behavior and to spur individuals to act in ways that benefit their groups. Group-serving behaviors sometimes impose a terrible cost on outsiders (as in warfare). But in general, groupishness is focused on improving the welfare of the ingroup, not on harming an outgroup.[71]

Plato and Aristotle illustrate this general principle. They wanted to organize a state that promotes the well-being of the people in the polis, rather than exploiting the resources of other civilized nations. The polis was mainly defined by its people, not by its land, state, or resources.[72] They also valued pan-Hellenism – the idea that Greeks from different city-states should cooperate based on their common origin.[73] They knew that cooperation between states can be vital to avoid the collapse of civilization.

To be sure, we do not claim enlightened tribalism eliminates out-group hostility while promoting in-group favoritism, only that it can balance or manage that hostility. Primarily, it can enhance existential meaning, moral virtues, and parochial altruism, which can lead to new forms of cooperation or identity, not merely to conflict.

---

[71] Haidt, 2012, p. 253.

[72] Lane, M. (2014). *Greek and Roman political ideas*. Penguin Press, pp. 13–14.

[73] Flower, M. (2000). Alexander the Great and Panhellenism. In A. B. Bosworth & E. J. Baynham (eds.), *Alexander the Great in fact and fiction* (pp. 96–135). Oxford University Press, p. 105.

b. Basic equal moral status

International cooperation should be based on mutual benefits and reciprocity, not on altruism, which is more appropriate at the national level. Sure, we need to provide global public goods that benefit all humans, such as security, environment, or trade. But these goods may have different costs and benefits for different groups and individuals. So, we require social norms and legal treaties that both encourage the provision of global public goods and respect national interests.

Many liberals and cosmopolitans reject this view. They argue that a *basic equal moral status* for all persons is crucial for international – or global – cooperation. This means that everyone should be treated as equally worthy of respect and concern. According to them, this status values our common humanity and still allows for some degree of partiality and loyalty to our groups. It protects everyone's basic rights and interests, promoting mutual respect among diverse cultures.[74] It also challenges injustice and inequality and calls for politics to respect universal moral principles and human dignity.[75] Likewise, this basic equality provides moral objectivity, as it recognizes some minimal moral truths or standards that apply to all humans, regardless of their differences. In short, it enables moral dialogue and debate,[76] without which cooperation may fail.

We are skeptical that basic moral equality constitutes a moral truth. Typically, the moral value of particular people depends on what they do, how they differ from other people, and how they differ from things like rocks and trees. For instance, our ability to think, feel, aspire, and demonstrate altruism – these all contribute to our moral value. Some people are valued more than others because of their abilities or kinship. Some are not valued at all, as wars often show.

Proponents of basic moral equality often argue that features like consciousness or the ability to experience pleasure and pain make everyone equally deserving of moral consideration. This means considering the similar interests of any conscious or sentient being with equal importance. But as Stan Husi notes,[77] such arguments have limitations: consciousness varies in intensity and experience across individuals and over time, and even if all living things can feel pain and pleasure, the degrees and complexity of these sensations differ greatly, potentially justifying moral distinctions.

Enlightened tribalism does not presume a single human nature. Evolution has produced diverse human natures, as humans adapted to different environments.[78] In other words, human nature is not uniform, and human beings are not "equal" in the sense of having the same nature or the same capacities. Still, enlightened tribalism is compatible with the widespread acceptance of basic moral equality by different social groups. Indeed, this principle could regulate tribalist practices, just as human rights are expected to do. For example, during conflicts, it could lead us to establish rules of engagement that protect civilians and ensure prisoners of war are treated well. It could also facilitate peace talks by encouraging a fair resolution of disputes.

---

74 Singer, P. (2004). *One world: The ethics of globalization*. Yale University Press.

75 Pogge, T. (2008). *World poverty and human rights: Cosmopolitan responsibilities and reforms*. Polity Press.

76 Sen, A. (2009). *The idea of justice*. Harvard University Press.

77 Husi, S. (2017). Why we (almost certainly) are not moral equals. *Journal of Ethics*, 21(4): 403–432. link to the article.

78 Winegard, B., Winegard, B., & Anomaly, J. (2020). Dodging Darwin: Race, evolution, and the hereditarian hypothesis. *Personality and Individual Differences,* 160, 109915. link to the article.

However, basic moral equality may not always be achievable. As the English saying goes, "All is fair in love and war." If intergroup competition is an enduring evolutionary force, basic moral equality can only be maintained if it does not harm the ability of groups to adapt, survive, and reproduce. Sometimes, giving equal consideration to the interests of other groups can be beneficial, as it may help form new alliances. Other times, it may not be beneficial. Often, groups find themselves competing for the same resources, territories, or power, leading to conflict. Nature is the ultimate judge of these competitions. If disregarding basic moral equality can sometimes help a group thrive and reproduce more effectively, then evolution will favor those who do so. Consequently, moral equality may only be practiced when it is adaptive, or at least not strongly counter-adaptive in an evolutionary sense.

The fact that evolutionary pressures constrain basic moral equality does not render this principle insignificant. Many rights have limits, but they are still important. For instance, free speech is limited by privacy and defamation laws. Property rights are limited by public needs for clean air, water, or housing. Basic moral equality is similar. It does not have to be absolute to be valuable.

However, basic moral equality is not just at odds with certain cases of intergroup competition; it can also hinder cooperation between different groups. This happens when countries, such as the USA, perceive the practices or beliefs of other nations as violating "universal" morality. As a result, they may intervene militarily abroad, claiming to support human rights or democracy, which often provokes resentment in the targeted countries. Such interventions can impose an alien moral system on populations for whom it may not fit, leading to unnecessary conflict.

Moreover, universal basic equality might encourage governments to act recklessly or selfishly, expecting that others will deal with the negative outcomes of their actions. This is known as "moral hazard." For example, a government may encourage large-scale immigration to foster economic growth or simply to be charitable to immigrants, believing that its native citizens will respect basic equality. But this may backfire if the host populations feel threatened or exploited by the newcomers. This can create anger or hostility, and even lead to violence, which could have been prevented if the expectations were more aligned with people's tribal tendencies.

In the context of evolution, cooperation based on mutual exchange – reciprocity – appears more feasible because it does not insist on basic equality, especially when such equality is not beneficial for a group. However, reciprocity can falter too. When it does, the most powerful party exerts its influence, which is hard to avoid. The best we can expect in those cases is enlightened and civilizing dominance.

c. War

Enlightened tribalism, underpinned by scientific and technological knowledge, can help mitigate the adverse effects of war. We do not claim to have a recipe for perpetual peace. Science and technology can enable both peace and war. Look at the impact of modern medicine, for instance. It has minimized the threat of diseases brought in by foreigners, making us more open to outsiders. But the same advancements in biotechnologies that gave us life-saving vaccines could also be used to create dangerous viruses, potential bioweapons.

Consider, too, the role of nuclear weapons. They act as a deterrent. However, conflicts persist, as seen in Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Why? Because nuclear weapons are held by many nations. Their use would be catastrophic and self-destructive. As a result, armies still hold significant importance. In the long term, one country may gain

an edge over another by developing new weapons – such as a system that can defend and retaliate against nuclear attacks. Because technological innovation can destabilize the power equilibrium among groups, war is unlikely to disappear.[79]

Despite these challenges, science may guide us in softening the blow of tribal rivalry. It is true that tribes battle over resources, but the end "goal" of evolution by natural selection is reproductive expansion rather than resource accumulation. Resources become valuable only when they contribute to reproduction. Therefore, a viable plan for harmonious coexistence among human populations might be to cultivate diverse reproductive growth strategies, whereby survival depends on various quantities and types of resources. This plan aligns with the evolutionary principle that different groups can coexist if they have different resource needs and occupy different niches.[80]

Enlightened tribalism aims to discourage the pursuit of universal cultural goals, partly to reduce competition over resources and avoid unnecessary conflicts. It thus opposes cultural homogenization, the practice of enforcing a uniform lifestyle and similar evolutionary strategies on everyone. Instead, it defends cultural diversity and different civilizational paths. Civilizations would vary from high-tech to rural, with power asymmetries between them. But coexistence would be more feasible in this scenario than in a system where all societies pursue similar resources and reproductive strategies.

This approach aims to humanize the raw force of natural selection, of which war is an extreme manifestation. It upholds the civilizing principle of calculating the costs and benefits of actions to limit needless pain. Natural selection is unavoidable, but norms and institutions should protect group interests while rejecting senseless aggression. A promising way to do this is to view most out-groups as adversaries rather than enemies. An adversary is a competitor, not necessarily hostile or harmful. An enemy, however, is hostile and intends to harm. Adversaries can push us to improve and even join our future identity through coalitions. Therefore, it is beneficial for each group to cooperate with its rivals to a degree. Naturally, some out-groups may remain enemies, but leaders should regularly assess that status rather than assuming it by default.

The odds of warfare are raised by human overconfidence, which often leads national leaders to believe they can triumph in unwinnable wars. Overconfidence might have been favored by natural selection in the past due to certain benefits, like enhancing combat performance or tricking an enemy.[81] However, in the past, it was often hard to assess the strength of a rival tribe. Sometimes, overconfidence paid off. At other times, it backfired and led to ruin and even extinction. Today, we should foster a political culture that values careful evaluation of conflicts, favoring evidence-based decisions over impulsive actions. This is especially vital in an era of advanced and deadly technologies. Of course, knowledge will always be imperfect, so passions and heuristics will always play a role. But we can use a combination of scientific knowledge and epistemic responsibility to help us decide whether war is necessary for achieving our goals.

---

79 Long, W. J. (2021). Cooperation and conflict in international relations. In W. Wilczynski & S. F. Brosnan (eds.), *Cooperation and conflict: The interaction of opposites in shaping social behavior* (pp. 7–25). Cambridge University Press.

80 Grover, J. (1997). *Resource competition*. Chapman & Hall, p. 331.

81 Johnson, D. (2004). *Overconfidence and war*. Harvard University Press.

d. Rationality

To be rational in a tribal setting may be challenging because of the nature of group-binding mechanisms. Tribes are often distinguished by their use of symbols. Distinctive clothing, food, rituals, and music are all ways in which some groups differentiate themselves from others, and through which people within groups bond with one another. Symbols must be costly to be effective. Otherwise, they could be easily imitated, and groups could risk infiltration by outsiders seeking to exploit their resources. Despite most people not comprehending the evolutionary basis of these actions, they behave as if they do.

What happens in a modern church service, or in a primitive hunter-gatherer ritual, is more similar than it looks on the surface. For example, many groups ask their members to do things like march, sing, or chant together, which we can see in soldiers, churchgoers, sports fans, or political party supporters. They also ask them to wear similar colors or symbols, such as team jerseys or party badges. And they ask them to build statues or monuments for their gods or ancestors, such as religious icons or historical figures. These rituals are not easy or cheap to do. They show that the group members are willing to give up their time and energy for the group's goals and good. As Atran and Henrich note, "groups and institutions that survive and spread will possess both costly displays of commitment (devotions and rituals) and values that glorify such sacrifices for group beliefs."[82]

Successful groups, then, often employ non-rational methods to foster unity. So, there may be a limit to how much we can expect ordinary people to consciously embrace an "enlightened" form of tribalism. However, this article does not aim to convince ordinary people that they should live a certain way. Instead, we argue that theorists and leaders should embrace a form of tribalism that is consistent with the evolved dispositions of ordinary people. This approach should be guided by scientific reason and moral reflection rather than ill-informed passions. Leaders should learn to ride the wave of tribalism, rather than fighting the tide of nature.

Conclusion

Enlightened tribalism pursues a virtuous mean between the excesses of cosmopolitan liberalism and blind tribalism. This balanced path offers a more effective way to structure human societies in a complex and competitive world.

Funding: This research was funded by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia: Contract D.L. no. 57/ 2016.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

[82] Atran, S., & Henrich, J. (2010). The evolution of religion. *Biological Theory*, 5(1): 23. link to the article.